



Department  
for Education

# **SEND bases in mainstream schools: Parent views**

## **Research report**

**June 2026**

**Department for Education**



Government  
Social Research

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Department for Education (DfE) would like to sincerely thank all parents and carers who completed this survey about SEND bases in mainstream schools. Their experiences, insights and opinions are valuable to inform our guidance.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the organisations who generously helped us disseminate our survey to parent and carers of children with SEND: the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) and Special Needs Jungle (SNJ).

## Executive summary

Department for Education conducted this research project to better understand the views and experiences of parents<sup>1</sup> of children and young people who currently attend or have previously attended a SEND base in a mainstream school. This evidence is an important part of shaping our understanding of SEND provision in mainstream schools.

In June 2025, we launched a survey with parents who have a child who currently attends, or has previously attended, one of the following types of SEND bases: a SEN unit (SU), resourced provision (RP) or a School's own unit for SEND provision within a mainstream school. In line with the reforms set out in [Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#), these types of SEN provision in mainstream schools now fall under the definition of an inclusion base, including both specialist bases (local authority funded SU and RPs) and support bases (schools' own units). As this survey was completed before these reforms were announced, we use the term SEND base in this report.

Over nine hundred parents responded to our survey which consisted of closed and open questions, providing us with rich insights into how different types of SEND bases are experienced by young people and their families. Experiences of SEND bases varied for a large range of reasons and this report explains the key drivers of more positive and more negative SEND base experiences. This research provides valuable evidence that supports the department's drive to scale up high quality provision in inclusion bases so that families' experiences are positive in every instance a child accesses a base.

## Key findings

The findings in this report reflect the opinions and views of parents who took part in our survey. Whilst 960 parents responded to our survey, the findings may not be fully representative of the wider population and should be interpreted as such. Where we have included breakdowns such as comparing school type to parent views, these are statistically significant which means that the difference we have found is very unlikely to have happened by chance.

Overall, the most common response when parents were asked about their child's experience of a base was that the experience was entirely positive (41%, Figure 2). A further 17% said that their child's experience was at least somewhat positive, with 17% entirely negative and 8% somewhat negative. The following findings describe the key drivers which underpin these experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term parents includes both parents and carers.

## Phase of education

Overall, the majority of parents across both primary and secondary phases with a child who had experience of a base reported a positive experience. Those with primary school experience were most likely to have positive views about the provision:

- those with primary school base experience were most likely to describe their time in the base as positive compared to those with secondary school base experience, including that the provision had made a positive impact on their child's academic progress and attainment, and more likely to be happy with the quality of education that their child received
- parents described the benefits of primary bases as: being smaller, in a calmer setting, with fewer children in the base and more concentrated support with access to specialist staff
- many parents described the mainstream school environment as overwhelming and unsuitable for their child, particularly large busy secondary schools where base attendees were required to navigate mainstream spaces
- with secondary schools representing a larger, busier education setting, the base was often referred to as a "safe space" away from the mainstream school environment
- in secondary school environments, positive experiences included enablers such as smaller more suitable environments in the base, specialist support from staff, and the perception that remaining in the mainstream school at the base gave their child better access to achieve academic outcomes such as gaining qualifications
- some parents raised concerns that secondary school settings were more susceptible to bullying

## Type of SEND base

Parents who had a child with experience of a resourced provision (RP) or SEN unit (SU), both types of local authority funded and recognised provisions, were significantly more likely to have a positive experience compared to other types of bases such as those which schools had set up and funded themselves (64% positive for RP and SU, 37% for school's own base and 46% for bases where the parent did not know the type). The majority of those who had experience of an SU or RP had an Education, Health and Care Plan (92% SU, 91% RP compared to 59% in schools' own units). Parents with a child who had SU or RP experience were more likely to agree with a variety of positive statements about the provision:

- that their child has access to the right amount of support
- that they are happy with the quality of education that their child receives

- that attending the base allows their child to access the benefits of mainstream education (e.g., curriculum and qualifications)
- and that the base improves their child's mental health and wellbeing

Parents described at length the positive impact that SEN units and resourced provisions had had on their child including: that these types of bases were able to meet their child's needs, with positive reflections about the teaching staff and types of specialist support, feeling that the base enabled their child to access and be engaged in education, improved their confidence and increased feelings of safety and happiness.

The majority (83%) of children and young people who attended a SEND base had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) according to their parents and 80% of those with EHCPs received their provision in SU or RPs (resourced provision (50%), SEN unit (30%)), both types of bases which are formally recognised and funded by the local authority and were associated with higher rates of positive experiences from parents in our survey. Comparatively, those without EHCPs were more likely to attend a School's own unit for SEND (41% vs 12% with EHCPs). There were no significant differences between those with and without EHCPs in SU or RPs, and as such our data suggests that the positive experiences may be driven by the type of base that those with EHCPs are most likely to attend rather than the presence of the EHCP itself.

Those who responded to our survey with EHCPs were also more likely to view the base provision they attended as positive, and agree to positive statements including that they felt the base had made a positive impact on their child's academic progress and attainment, that their child accessed the right amount of specialist support, that the physical environment was more suitable for them and that they had better academic outcomes compared to if they attended mainstream classes full time.

Many parents stated in written responses that they believed their child's EHCP contributed to their positive experience of a SEND base because this provided them with a formal plan detailing their child's needs. In the case of SEN units and resourced provision, often schools required an EHCP to be eligible for this type of provision.

## **Those who preferred a SEND base**

Just over half (52%) of parents said that the base was the preferred option for their child's education. Those who wanted their child to attend a base were more likely to report a positive base experience compared to those who preferred special school or a mainstream place, with 80% of parents who wanted their child to attend a base reporting an at least somewhat positive experience.

In written responses, some parents stated that they wanted mainstream provision for their child but later opted for the base due to unmet needs, with the base having the ability to provide specialist tailored support which was described as a lifeline for maintaining attendance and improving wellbeing. Some parents would have preferred that their child

attended a special school but instead received provision from a base as local options were unsuitable or unavailable.

## **School staff and specialist support**

Many parents who had stated that their child's experience of a SEND base was positive felt that a key contributor to this was having good quality teachers and specialist staff providing support in the base. This included:

- having sufficient teacher to pupil ratio, having teachers and staff who were trained in SEN and having support from specialist workforce such as Educational Psychologists (EPs), Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs), Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and staff with specialisms in particular need types
- just over half (51%) of parents agreed that their child had access to the right amount of specialist support, and 63% agreed that they were happy with the quality of support that their child receives in the base
- some written responses from parents outlined the 'life changing' impact that quality staffing can have in base provision, ensuring pupil 'needs are at the very centre of everything' which enabled significant progress for those receiving provision

Parents who shared negative base experiences frequently mentioned a lack of staff expertise in SEN, too few members of staff in the base and an absence of specialist staff as barriers to a positive experience, resulting in an inability to meet needs or achieve progress for their child.

## **Inclusiveness**

When asked if their child felt part of the wider school rather than just the base, over half (55%) of parents felt that their child felt at least somewhat part of the wider school (36% disagreed, remainder didn't know). Key enablers for inclusion were reported by parents as:

- conscious effort by the wider school and senior leadership team to create a culture of inclusion through deliberate actions
- giving pupils the agency to move between the base and the mainstream school if they would like to, rather than separating them from their peers
- the majority of parents agreed that attending the base allows their child to remain in the local community compared to attending special school
- half of respondents agreed that their child benefits from socialising with children in the wider school whilst in the base (37% disagreed, the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed), and just under half of parents were happy with the amount of access their child had to mainstream classes (31% disagreed, the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed)

Over one third (36%) of parents felt that their child did not feel part of the wider school at all. In written responses, many parents who had a child with a negative experience of a SEND base stated that a key reason for this was that attendance at the base felt like segregation or isolation from the remainder of the mainstream school and their peers, rather than inclusion. Some parents felt that the feeling of otherness was intensified for their child in the base, highlighting their differences amongst their mainstream peers.

## **Physical environment**

The majority (65%, of which 46% strongly agreed) of parents agreed that the base was a more suitable environment for their child and over three quarters of all parents agreed that the smaller class size of the base is more suitable for their child. Positive elements of the physical environment included:

- small class sizes and calmer spaces often with sensory corners or rooms
- adaptive elements such as alternative materials and specially built acoustics
- the base environment was often described as contributing to the ways in which the provision was able to meet pupil needs and enable progress in a way that the mainstream classrooms were unable to

Overcrowding in bases was experienced by a number of parents who reported a negative base experience. This was particularly the case in secondary schools and was perceived as a key barrier to support their child's needs. High numbers of children and young people attending the base with varying levels of complex needs was perceived as worsening the base experience for those attending.

## **Communication with parents and family support**

The majority of parents agreed that they felt informed about how their child was progressing in the base.

Parents frequently stated that good communication with the school, receiving regular updates on how their child was progressing and feeling listened to by staff enabled a positive base experience for them and their child. A lack of communication was viewed as a barrier to positive experiences and did not allow parents to have a good understanding of how their child was progressing in the base.

## **Pupil outcomes and learning**

The majority (64%) of parents felt that the base had made an at least somewhat positive impact on their child's progress and attainment (of which 45% felt this was a significant positive impact). This included:

- 52% agreed that attending the base allows their child to access the benefits of a mainstream education such as curriculum and qualifications

- over half (58%) agreed that they were happy with the quality of education that their child receives (of which 39% strongly agreed).
- 57% of parents felt that their child had better academic outcomes compared to if they attended mainstream classes full time

More parents (39%) disagreed than agreed (32%) that their child had better academic outcomes than if they had attended special school (the remainder didn't know or neither agreed nor disagreed). In some cases, although parents felt positive about the base, they felt that their child would have had their needs better met in special school.

## **Wider pupil outcomes**

Parents described in their written responses the types of outcomes that their child had experienced when their needs had been met by the base. These outcomes largely centred around two main themes:

- 'hard' outcomes, which were described as improvements in attendance, attainment and qualifications
- 'soft' outcomes, which included increases in confidence, social and interpersonal skills, independence, happiness, mental health, emotional regulation and wellbeing

Parents frequently described positive outcomes as "life changing" for both the child or young person and their family, perceiving significant progress for their child in both hard and soft outcomes.

## **Inability to meet pupil needs**

A quarter of those responding to our survey had at least a somewhat negative experience. In written responses, in almost all cases of negative experiences parents felt that the base was not able to meet the needs of their child. When the base was unable to meet needs, this was described as having a severe negative impact on their child's mental health, poor school attendance or refusal to attend and in some cases creating "school-based trauma". Reasons given by parents for the base not being able to meet needs were:

- a lack of knowledge in SEN from the base staff
- overcrowding of pupils in attendance
- unsuitable physical environments which were overstimulating
- large numbers of pupils with complex needs in one setting leading to burnout and dysregulation
- not being able to fulfil the academic needs of the child or young person

## Reasons that a SEND base was not used

Whilst this research sought to understand parent views of their child's experience of a SEND base, respondents were also asked why they had not used this provision where this was the case:

- over a quarter of those whose child did not attend a base for SEND support said that this was because the mainstream school they attend does not have a base
- 17% believed their child would qualify for a place in a base but preferred their child to be educated in special school
- 12% preferred their child to be educated in mainstream classes without attending a base
- one third (33%) selected 'other' and some parents specified other reasons as to why their child did not attend a base, including:
  - belief that the mainstream school could not meet complex SEND needs
  - prior trauma from mainstream acting as a barrier to attending a base
  - perception that bases are not suitable environments for children and young people with sensory needs
  - lack of SEND base places, closures of bases and oversubscription
  - several parents were waiting for an EHCP for their child to enable base attendance (for bases where this was a requirement)
  - the perception that bases cause isolation rather than inclusion

Parents without base experience were given the opportunity to feedback their wider thoughts about SEND bases. Many felt that bases are not a 'one size fits all' solution and that they work best in contexts where the provision was well funded, resourced with specialist staff, in suitable adapted environments with small and calm spaces and were designed with specific SEND types and needs in mind.

## Next steps and conclusions

The Department for Education is working to ensure that all bases are underpinned by inclusive practices and deliver consistently high-quality provision as set out in our next steps section of this report. As part of this, the findings of this report have informed the department's [inclusion base guidance](#). You can read the department's response to this research report and how the findings have informed policymaking in an accompanying [cover note](#).

# Background

## What are SEND bases?

SEN units (SU) and resourced provisions (RPs) are SEN provisions within mainstream schools, formally recognised by the local authority, which receive high needs funding. These are hybrid provisions typically combining access to mainstream classes with specialist support, and the opportunity to take part in whole school life in their local community. Some mainstream schools operate and fund their own base for SEND support, not funded by the local authority, which we refer to as School's own units for SEND support. In line with the reforms set out in [Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#), these types of SEN provision in mainstream schools now fall under the definition of an inclusion base, including both specialist bases (local authority funded SU and RPs) and support bases (school's own units). As this survey was completed before these reforms were announced, we use the term SEND base in this report.

In January 2025, there were 449 schools in England with SEN units, an increase from 392 in 2024. There were 1,217 schools with a resourced provision, a slight increase from 1,168 in 2023<sup>2</sup>.

DfE does not hold data on School's own units that support pupils with SEND. However, we have conducted recent research which has gathered some evidence about these types of bases. In January 2025 we published this research on In-School Support Units, where we conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with ten schools operating support units which met a variety of pupil needs including support for those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs or wider SEND<sup>3</sup>. In February 2025 we published survey data from school leaders which found that of the 22% of primary and 68% of secondary schools who operated an in-school behaviour unit, 88% of primary schools and 42% of secondary schools offered SEND support in this provision<sup>4</sup>.

## Research aims

Whilst Department for Education administrative data and recent research projects can evidence some information about the prevalence and use of SEND bases in schools, a significant evidence gap has been understanding how parents view these types of provision and what they think about their child's experience of receiving education in these settings, a gap this research aims to address.

The research questions for this project were:

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<sup>2</sup> [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25, DfE](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Explorative research into In-school Support Units](#), January 2025, DfE.

<sup>4</sup> [School and college voice](#): February 2025, DfE.

1. What are the views of parents and carers of children and young people who have received support from a SEND base in a mainstream school?
2. To what extent do parents and carers of children and young people who have experienced SEND bases believe that the provision has improved outcomes for their child?
3. Does the experience of parents and carers vary depending on the type of SEND base experienced?

Our survey questions reflected these, with a focus on asking questions which enable us to understand how parents and carers feel about the experience that their child has had in a SEND base. By asking questions about the phase of education, presence of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and type of SEND base, our analysis has been able to compare opinions and experiences across these groups.

## Methodology

This survey was created by Government Social Researchers (GSRs) and was tested and co-created with parents and carers of children with SEND before launch. We received ethics approval from the GSR Ethics Panel to conduct this research. In addition to testing the survey with parents, we consulted not-for-profit organisation Special Needs Jungle and incorporated their feedback on this survey. The survey was then programmed into Qualtrics which is a survey management software.

Our sampling approach was a self-selection sample, where parents could voluntarily take part. Our target group for the survey was parents and carers of children and young people with SEND who had experience of receiving provision from a SEND base at a mainstream school. The survey was distributed with an open link to the survey sent out by the three main routes outlined below:

1. the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) emailed a survey link to their membership of parents and carers across England
2. an email was sent to a list of primary and secondary schools in England who had taken part in previous DfE research and had granted permission for recontact who were asked to distribute the survey link to parents with experience of a base
3. Special Needs Jungle (SNJ) shared a survey link with their email subscribers

When conducting research, it is important that we can be reasonably sure that the individuals filling out our survey are genuine respondents. We controlled this by asking any organisations we work with to only share the survey link to their email list, and not to share the survey online in public forums. Unfortunately, the survey link appeared on two separate website blogs and on social media, which means that we cannot be as sure that all those who responded are the intended group of parents and carers. During analysis, lengthy quality assurance processes were undertaken to clean all data included in this report and ensure only genuine responses were included, though it is important to note

that whilst measures have been taken, this is an open link survey that anyone could have responded to.

We received 960 partial and complete responses across dissemination routes to our survey from parents who had children with experience of a SEND base<sup>5</sup>. This number of responses provides us with rich and valuable insight into parent views, many of whom provided open text written responses in our survey which has been analysed by social researchers with a small amount of assistance from artificial intelligence. However, as our sample approach was self-selection, our results may not be representative of the wider population.

Whilst this survey aimed to understand the views of parents who had a child who had experienced a SEND base, we did ask parents of children with SEND why they had not when this was the case. We received an additional 288 responses from respondents who had a child with SEND who did not have experience of a SEND base. We have included analysis of these responses in this report.

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<sup>5</sup> Not all respondents completed our survey in full however we have included their answers in our report for the questions they have answered which relate to their experience of a base. Those who did not have base experience but shared their views have been included in the [relevant section](#) of this report.

## Who responded to our survey?

### Phase of education and type of base

Out of 960 parents and carers who responded to our survey both partially and fully, just over half (55%) had a child with experience of a primary school SEND base, with 44% having secondary school experience. A small proportion (1%) of respondents had nursery school SEND base experience. The latter are not included in this report due to the very low number of responses for this group.

**Table 1. Phase of education that SEND base was experienced in**

Phase of education	Proportion of responses (%)
Primary school	55%
Secondary school	44%

Base: Primary school (526), Secondary school (427). We received 7 responses (1%) from those with nursery school experience however we have not included this number in reporting due to the low base.

Our survey asked parents and carers questions about the experience that their child has had in a SEND base. The term SEND base in this research includes local authority funded bases such as resourced provisions and SEN units as well as types of SEND bases that schools have set up and funded themselves. We included brief descriptions of SEND bases (table 2) in our survey, however some respondents may have different interpretations of a SEND base due to uncertainty about what constitutes a base in the sector. The majority of respondents had a child with experience of a resourced provision (45%), with over a quarter having experience of a SEN unit (27%). A smaller proportion (16%) had experienced a base which the school had set up and funded themselves.

**Table 2. Type of SEND base experienced**

Type of SEND base	
Resourced provision (formally recognised and funded by the local authority)	45%
SEN unit (formally recognised and funded by the local authority)	27%
School's Own Unit for SEND (set up and funded by the school)	16%
I don't know	12%

Base: Resourced provision (432), SEN unit (258), School's own unit for SEND (156), I don't know (114).

## When the base was used and the duration

The majority of respondents had a child who currently attended a base (62%). Of the 38% who had a child who previously attended a base, just under half (47%) had received base provision in the last two academic years (2024/25 and 2023/24). Almost one in five of those with previous experience (19%) was related to base attendance prior to the academic year 2020-2021.

Which academic year base attendance finished in	
2024-2025	25%
2023-2024	22%
2022-2023	14%
2021-2022	10%
2020-2021	6%
Prior to academic year 2020-2021	19%
I don't know	4%

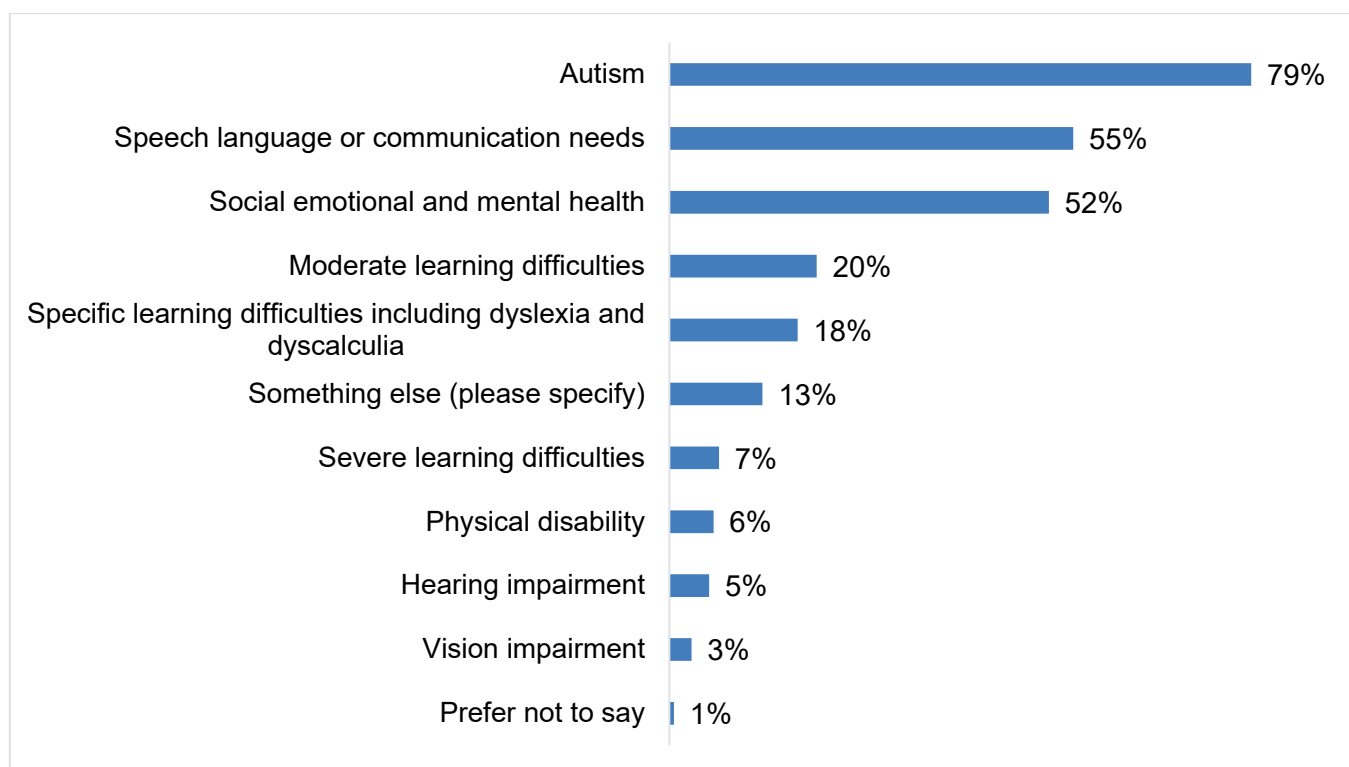
Base: 369 who previously attended a base but do not currently.

Those with current and prior base experience were asked how long their child attended for. Almost half of those with previous experience (48%) and 40% of those who currently attend, attended the base for over 1 year but less than an entire phase of education and this was the largest proportion of responses for both groups.

## Need type

Our survey asked parents what the primary need type was of their child with base experience, with the ability to select more than one. Over three quarters (79%) of respondents stated that their child had autism. Speech, language or communication needs (55%) and social, emotional and mental health needs (52%) were the second and third most common responses. The most common responses for 'something else' was ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Other responses here included early trauma, complex medical needs, sensory issues and undiagnosed SEN at the time of attending the base.

**Figure 1. Primary need type of child with base experience (multiple answer)**



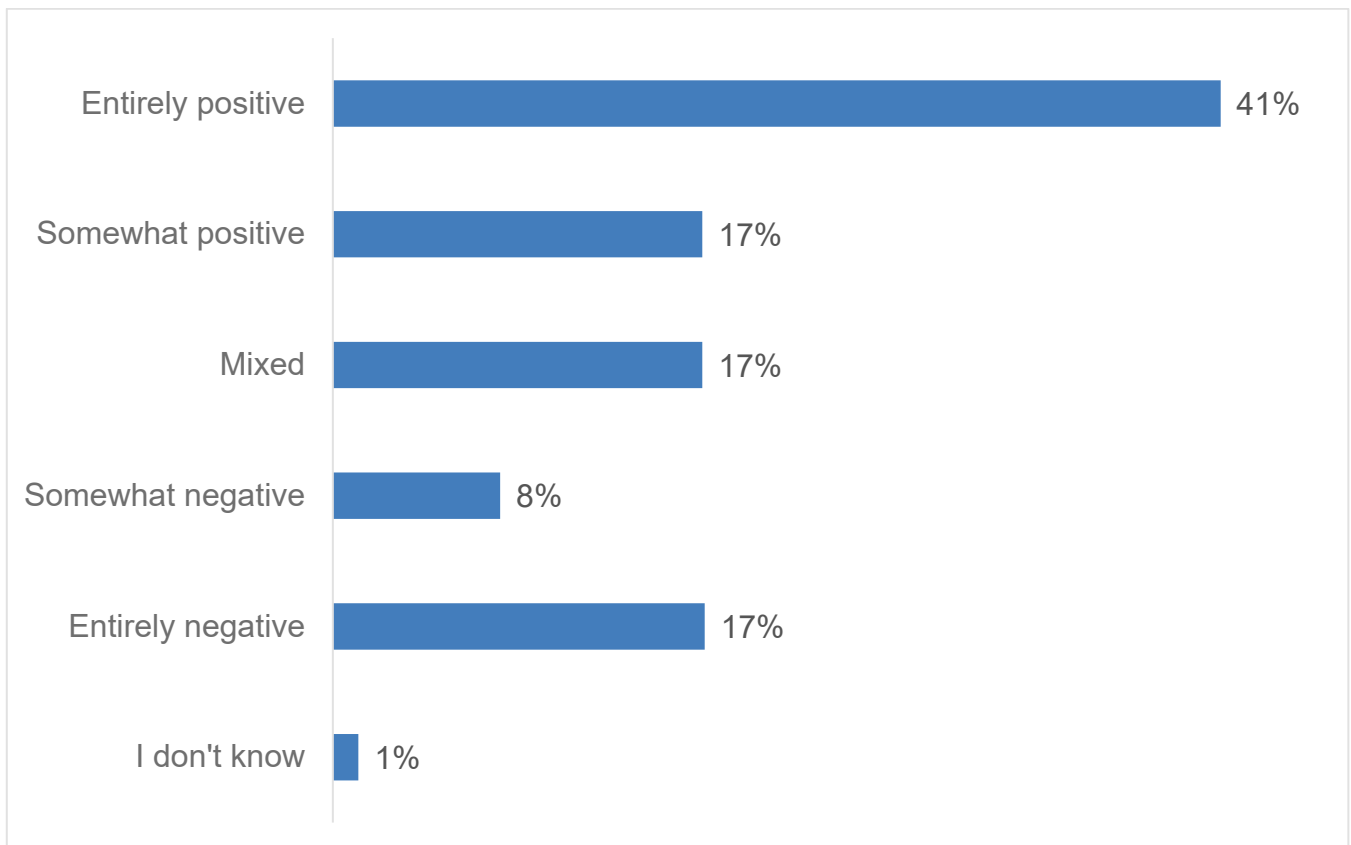
Base: 960 parents. Respondents could select more than one need type.

## Drivers of base experiences

The findings in this report bring together statistical analysis of survey data, with additional qualitative analysis of written responses that parents shared with us in this research to describe their and their child's experience of a SEND base.

Overall, the most common response when parents were asked about their child's experience of a base was that the experience was entirely positive (41%, Figure 2). A further 17% said that their child's experience was at least somewhat positive. Seventeen per cent said that their experience was entirely negative, with a further 17% who said their experience was somewhat negative.

**Figure 2. Which of the following most accurately describes your and your child's experience of a base?**



Base: 943 responses.

Although the majority of parents reported a positive experience in response to the closed survey questions, we received a higher amount of detailed written responses from parents who had a negative experience. As such, some sections include more negative themes than positive despite a majority reporting positive experiences overall.

This section of the report presents the evidence this research collected on what parents believe contributes to positive and negative experience of a SEND base, and what parents felt the outcomes are for young people who have SEND base experience. Where we have included breakdowns such as comparing school type to parent views, these are

statistically significant which means that the difference we have found is very unlikely to have happened by chance.

## Phase of education

### Base experience across phases

The majority of parents who had a child with primary base experience (62%) and half of parents with a child who had secondary experience (50%) had an at least somewhat positive experience. (Table 3).

**Table 3. Phase of education compared with base experience**

	Primary	Secondary
NET positive	62%	50%
NET negative	20%	31%
Mixed	17%	17%
I don't know	1%	1%

Base: 517 primary, 420 secondary. NET positive includes somewhat and entirely positive experience. NET negative includes somewhat and entirely negative experience.

The majority of parents across phases felt that the provision had made a positive impact on their child's academic progress and attainment and were happy with the quality of education that their child receives.

### High levels of satisfaction with primary school bases

Those who had a child with experience of primary school SEND bases were most likely to feel that the provision had made a positive impact on their child's academic progress and attainment (69% primary, 57% secondary), though over half of respondents with secondary school experience also expressed positive views.

Respondents with primary school experience were also more likely to be happy with the quality of education that their child received (62% vs 53% secondary) and more likely to agree that their child had access to the right amount of specialist support (54% vs 47% secondary). Those with primary experience were also more likely to agree that their child spends less time travelling than they would to attend another suitable setting (50% vs 42% secondary).

Many parents described their positive experiences of primary school bases in our survey. These experiences covered a range of areas including the benefits of a smaller setting, fewer children in the base, more concentrated support and access to specialist staff.

My child has progressed well in [the base]. The differentiation in her lessons at school has made such a difference and gradually we are seeing the required positive changes. We are still on the journey, but it is positive to see the great impacts in both her academics and social communication. The teachers are very knowledgeable and provide the required support. [Primary school name] is an outstanding school with great values embedded throughout the curriculum. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in primary school*

Some parents expressed that the needs of their child were not able to be met in mainstream primary classes however since moving into a base at a primary school which specialised in the needs of their child, they had experienced progress.

My child was in a primary mainstream, but was not coping at all, due to her sensory needs due to [her SEN type]. Me and her mainstream school found her a place in a unit for children [with her SEN type] and now she is thriving and happy. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in primary school*

## **Safe spaces in secondary school bases**

Half of parents with a child in a secondary school base had an at least somewhat positive experience (50%, Table 3), with 57% feeling that the base had made a positive impact on their child's academic progress and attainment. Many of these positive experiences included enablers explored later in the report such as smaller more [suitable environments](#) in the base, [specialist support from staff](#), and the perception that remaining in the mainstream school at the base gave their child better access to achieve [academic outcomes](#) such as gaining qualifications.

With secondary schools representing a larger, busier education setting, the base was often referred to as a "safe space" away from the mainstream school environment.

Without access to the base for support, a safe space, sensory room, speech and language support, occupational therapy, classroom support in mainstream classrooms they would in my opinion have been excluded from education whereas with the support there is a realistic possibility of GCSE attainment albeit in only a few subjects. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in secondary school*

## Parental concerns over secondary bases

Although half of parents with a child who had secondary school base experience had an at least somewhat positive experience, many of those with secondary experience gave written responses as to why their experience had been less satisfactory.

Many parents felt that children who attend secondary school bases were more susceptible to bullying than in primary, with base children made to feel “othered” with a “target on their back”. Bases in secondary school environments were perceived to highlight differences between children who attended the base compared to their mainstream peers.

It made them somewhat of a target from the kids in mainstream provision and as a result of this, they were the victim of bullying which impacted adversely on their mental health. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in secondary school*

The base is extremely good, staff are knowledgeable, have a good understanding of neurodiversity and my child. My child feels understood and supported by them. However my child struggles with how mainstream children view the base and occasionally has comments made to him. As a parent I feel what the base offers my child is incredible and my child recognises this however because of how this base is viewed by peers my child would prefer to attend mainstream fully. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in secondary school*

Some parents with a child who had a positive primary base experience where they were not fully integrated into the mainstream school expressed concern about how this support would work in secondary, highlighting that bullying and segregation was a strong concern for them when considering making the transition from primary to secondary.

## Mainstream environments

### Access to the benefits of mainstream

Out of all respondents, just over half (52%) of parents agreed that attending the base allowed their child to “access the benefits of a mainstream education such as the mainstream curriculum and qualifications”. In many circumstances, parents described situations where their child had academic strengths but required support from the base to access a mainstream curriculum.

While my son has many academic strengths, he also experiences significant challenges related to [his SEN]. The [base] offers a vital bridge that allows him to engage meaningfully with the academic curriculum while receiving the targeted and therapeutic support he needs to navigate the demands of a mainstream environment. The structure and familiarity of the [base] give him a secure base within school—a calm, low-arousal setting where he can regulate, refocus, and access learning in a way that is suited to his neurodivergent profile [...] Without this provision, the risk of disengagement from learning is significant. In a busy and often overwhelming [school] setting, the [base] ensures that his educational experience is not only academically rigorous but also emotionally and physically accessible. It supports his wellbeing while enabling him to thrive in a high-achieving setting he would otherwise struggle to remain part of. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in secondary school*

## **Barriers of the secondary mainstream environment**

In written responses many parents of children with secondary school base experience stated that the base being situated within a large, busy mainstream secondary school was a barrier to having a positive base experience for their child.

The mainstream school cannot change how it is built, the smells, the lighting, the noise. Our [child] like others, could not cope in this mainstream school with a 3 roomed [base]. When she was at school, she spent 1-2 periods a day in the base but was expected to attend mainstream lessons. She did not attend any full school day. She had a mental breakdown due to being forced into an environment that was not right. The school did their best however it is not suited to meet those [children and young people] who struggle with busy environments and experience multiple sensory issues. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in secondary school*

Although the bases themselves were often described as being calm and quiet spaces, the environment of the wider mainstream school during breaks, lunches, or simply travelling to and from the car was viewed by many parents as a significant barrier.

My child could not cope with the environment of a mainstream school from a social, emotional, mental health or sensory perspective. Even though the base gave them a quieter and more bespoke learning environment they had to access the main school to attend the base and be around over 1000 pupils in the school. The base could not meet their needs and they ended up in total burnout and unable to attend school. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience in secondary school*

For some parents, their child benefited from the support that the base gave but were concerned that they were not being treated the same as their mainstream peers. This was described as particularly challenging when the young person receiving support both wanted to be in mainstream classrooms for fearing of being left out but found the mainstream environment to be overwhelming and unsuitable.

[The base] was fantastic for both of my children's [speech and language] development. However, in my daughter's case, it delayed the difficulties she would experience in a larger environment. [...] She loves being fully included in a mainstream school. The issue is school and class sizes. She is very intelligent yet has complex needs. She doesn't want to be othered and segregated. Not being able to access noisy, crowded environments and needing to leave the room caused her enormous anxiety. My son has had a failed transition to secondary. He absolutely hated being made leave lessons for interventions, refused to register in the [base], as it made him look different to his peers. - *Parent of children with SEND base experience in secondary school*

## Type of SEND base

### Positive experiences for those in SEN units and resourced provisions

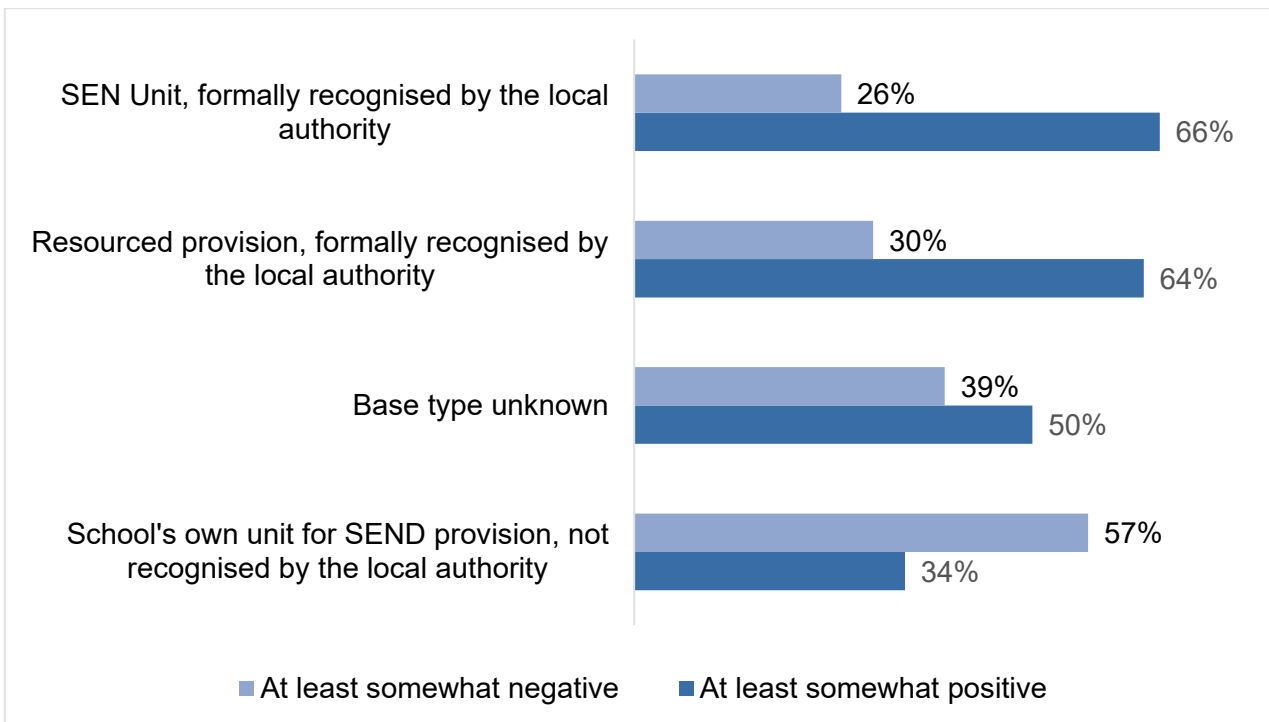
Parents who had a child with experience of a resourced provision (RP) or SEN unit (SU), both types of local authority funded and recognised provisions, were significantly more likely to report a positive experience compared to those which schools had set up and funded themselves or where parents did not know the base type (64% positive for RP and SU, 37% for school's own base and 46% for bases where the parent did not know the type)<sup>6</sup>.

This was a common theme across the survey, where parents with this type of SEND base experience were more likely to agree with a range of positive statements about the provision. This included agreeing that their child has access to the right amount of specialist support, that they are happy with the quality of education their child receives (Figure 3), that attending the base allows their child to access the benefits of mainstream education (e.g., curriculum and qualifications), that their child has better academic outcomes compared to if they attended special school, and that the base improves their child's mental health and wellbeing.

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<sup>6</sup> The majority of those who had experience of an SU or RP had an Education, Health and Care Plan (92% SU, 91% RP compared to 59% in schools' own units).

**Figure 3. I am happy with the quality of education that my child receives (%) by base type**



Base: 915 total. Resourced provision (419), SEN unit (243), School's own unit (148), base unknown (105)

In written responses, parents described at length the positive impact that SEN units and resourced provisions had had on their child. Many parents felt that these types of bases were able to meet their child's needs, with positive reflections about the teaching staff and types of specialist support, feeling that the base enabled their child to access and be engaged in education, improved their confidence and increased feelings of safety and happiness.

The below quote illustrates one of many positive written responses, with a number of parents expressing a desire for more units to open.

The progress shown year on year is remarkable when in an environment that is fully trained for child's needs, can spot triggers and help child regulate ahead of meltdowns. This level of training and resources cannot simply be adopted by mainstream schools and would require specialist training across staff to be able to meet the need of my child. It would be great if more of these [resource bases] exist as we travel over an hour to get to school with no similar units in our area. - *Parent of a child with resourced provision experience*

As well as describing the quality of education and support that had been received, some parents described how the unit had been used to support transition back into mainstream school.

We were nervous about my child transitioning to secondary school. He spent 75%+ of his time in the [SEN unit] for the first two years (7-8), slowly getting him used to things, then was phased into the main school in year 9. Now he's fully in the main school for lessons in year 10 and sitting his GCSEs next year (which we didn't know if he was going to be able to do). [The school's] excellent SEN team gave him the soft landing/a safe space to retreat to he desperately needed, built his confidence and now he's thriving. - *Parent of a child with SEN unit experience*

Some parents of children with SEND base experience which was not a SEN unit or resourced provision did provide positive written statements, however in line with overall less positive experiences of these bases, there were fewer of these.

There are a number of staff members in the class with only 10 children meaning my child receives constant attention and supervision. They have [a] tailored schedule, which focuses specifically on their areas of need and learning which means the work provided is specific to my child which is positive as the main focus for him is his own development which is different to his peers. - *Parent of a child with School's own unit experience*

The majority of children and young people who attended a SEND base had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with 80% of those with EHCPs receiving their base provision in a resourced provision or a SEN unit (50% RP, 30% SU), both types of bases formally recognised and funded by the local authority and base types that were associated with higher rates of positive experiences from parents in our survey. Schools who operate resourced provisions and SEN units often require pupils to have an EHCP to attend this type of provision, though this is not always the case and is not a government requirement. Comparatively, those without EHCPs were more likely to attend a School's own unit for SEND (41% vs 12% with EHCPs).

Those whose child had an EHCP were more likely to have a positive experience of a SEND base than those without (61% vs 40% without an EHCP) and were also more likely to agree to positive statements including that they felt the base had made a positive impact on their child's academic progress and attainment (68% positive for those with EHCPs vs 46% without), that their child accessed the right amount of specialist support (54% vs 33% without), that the physical environment was more suitable for them (68% vs 47% without) and that they had better academic outcomes compared to if they attended mainstream classes full time (60% vs 41% without). The difference in experiences for pupils with and without EHCPs was not significant within each type of base, and our data suggests that positive experiences may be driven by the type of base they were more likely to attend with an EHCP (SEN units or resourced provision) rather than the presence of the EHCP itself.

Parents stated in written responses that they believed their child's EHCP contributed to their positive experience of a SEND base because this provided them with a formal plan

detailing their child's needs. A number of parents wrote about how they felt that having a plan of how their child's needs would be met contributed to their positive experience of a SEND base. Many of these parents felt that this was the key component to unlocking the right level of support for their child in the base, enabling their needs to be met. Given current practice of many school's restricting SEN unit and resourced base places to those with EHCPs, some parents were concerned that without the EHCP, they would not have been able to be educated in this setting.

Due to the type of support my daughter needs this base only works because it is specialised and the staff are highly trained - her EHCP is a huge part of this as it tailors that support and specifies word for word what that support should entail and how it should be carried out. It also specifies who in the multi-disciplinary team should be providing that support and what they should be doing. The resource base at my daughter's school is a very good example of how a resource base should work for a particular group of children in this case autistic children with complex learning needs and social & communication difficulties. - *Parent of child with SEND Base experience*

Some parents who had a negative base experience spoke of concerns that their child's EHCP was not being followed correctly at the base or wider school.

[My child is] only offered minimal time in the base (3 lessons per fortnight) which is nowhere near enough to deliver the EHCP provision or to offer the support they need to access their education. - *Parent of child with SEND Base experience*

In some cases, an EHCP was required to meet the eligibility criteria of the base which took a long time to secure and delayed sufficient education however once fulfilled was able to meet needs.

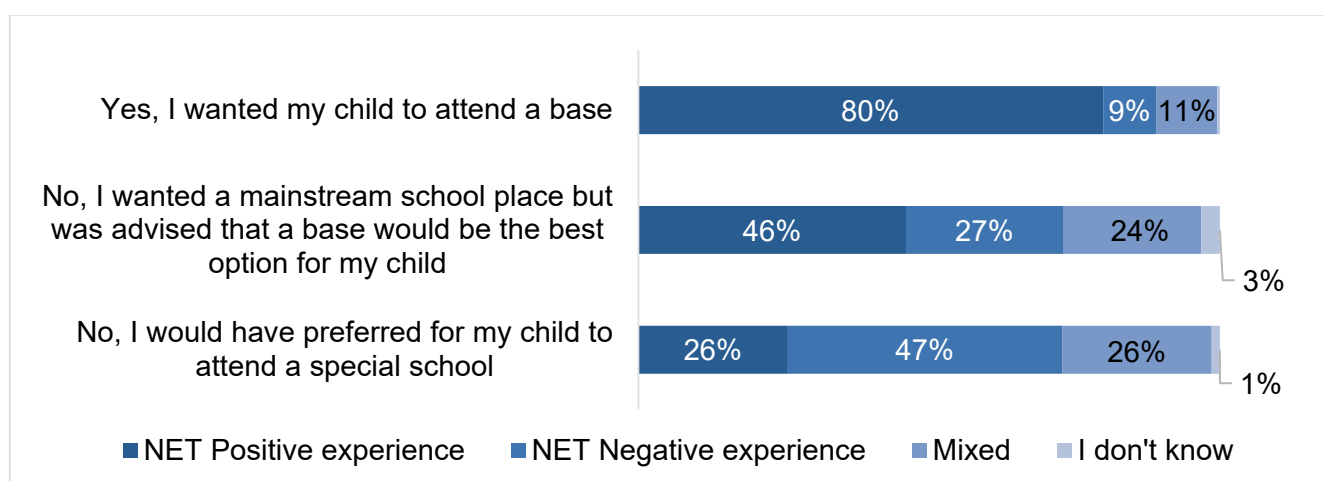
[My son's] EHCP took 72 weeks to be confirmed. His education was delayed by a year as school couldn't meet his needs without one. Since he enrolled, he has had the best of experiences. He runs in as happy as can be each day. He has developed from a nonverbal child to one gaining in confidence more and more. [...] His reading and writing though significantly delayed is coming along well. All progress is monitored and often supported with photos. Most importantly he is in the right environment for him, he is safe and secure. [...] My son has spent 5 years in the same 4 rooms with the same people and had the best experience. We got this so right, it will be so hard when it's time to leave. - *Parent of child with SEND Base experience*

## Those who preferred a SEND base

Respondents were asked if a base was the preferred option for their child’s education provision. Just over half (52%) of respondents said yes, with 23% stating that they would have preferred that their child attended special school. Seven per cent of respondents would have preferred that their child remain in mainstream classes but were advised that the SEND base would be more suitable for them.

Those who wanted their child to attend a base were more likely to have a positive base experience, with 80% (Figure 4) of this group of parents having a positive experience. Almost half (46%) of parents who wanted a mainstream school place but were recommended a base had a positive experience. The group least likely to report a positive base experience were those would have preferred a special school for their child, with just over a quarter (26%) having a positive experience.

**Figure 4. Base preference vs positive or negative experience of provision**



Base: Yes, I wanted my child to attend a base (493), No, I would have preferred for my child to attend special school (214), No, I wanted a mainstream school place (63). 173 responses said Other.

Some respondents provided a written answer for this question, with many parents stating that they wanted mainstream provision for their child but later opted for the base due to unmet needs, with the base having the ability to provide specialist tailored support which was described as a “lifeline” for maintaining attendance and improving wellbeing. Some parents would have preferred that their child was educated in a special school as they felt this provision would better suit their child’s needs but instead received provision from a base as local options were unsuitable or unavailable.

My child was struggling in his mainstream class and at that time the [base] was the best place for him to be. After 6 months he was able to be access his mainstream education again with strategies put in place. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## School staff and specialist support

### Staff quality

Many parents who had stated that their child's experience of a SEND base was positive felt that a key contributor to this was having good quality teachers and school staff providing support in the base. This included having a sufficient teacher to pupil ratio, having teachers and staff who were trained in SEN and having support from specialist workforce such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, special educational needs coordinators and staff who were specialists in the need type that their child had. Just over half (51%) of parents agreed that their child had access to the right amount of specialist support, and 63% agreed that they were happy with the quality of support that their child receives in the base.

The base has changed my daughter's and our family's life. Prior to attending her current high school with a base, she could not access lessons and was failing at school.[...] She has a diagnosis of [speech, language and communication needs] and the base she has been attending since she transitioned to high school has a specialist resourced provision for DLD, which means that she now is surrounded by staff and key workers who fully understand her needs. The base is ensuring that all my child's specific and complex needs are addressed by implementing all the necessary adjustments on a daily basis and delivering the educational offer described in her EHCP. Specialised staff with the right expertise ensure that she can access the curriculum by liaising with teaching staff and parents on a daily basis, they have full understanding of her speech and language disability and continuously revise a bespoke support plan which enables her to thrive and without which she could not fulfil her potential. My daughter and her needs are at the very centre of everything that goes on and I have no doubt that her progress and achievements would simply not be possible in a mainstream school without a base, as teaching staff in a normal mainstream would not have the time nor the resources to adapt the subject content to her specific needs, nor would they have the means, time or money to provide the pre-teaching she needs in every subject. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

For some parents, school staff members provided support outside of the base as well, such as providing one on one support in mainstream classes or attending extracurricular activities with them like school trips.

She was supported in the base by a trained teacher and lots of specialist support staff. These support staff also supported her 1:1 in the mainstream class for half the day. She was fully included in trips etc with 1:1 staff. In the base she did English and maths with extra support and resources but attended other lessons with her class. The SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) was very proactive and headteacher was very supportive. It was flexible to her needs. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Capacity and expertise

Parents who shared negative base experiences frequently mentioned a lack of expertise in SEN, too few members of staff and an absence of specialist staff as main contributors to their and their child's experience of a base.

In some cases, parents felt that the school itself tried its best to be inclusive but that the lack of specialist staff available in the base resulted in an inability to meet the needs of their child.

[Our school] is a wonderfully inclusive school and have tried their absolute best but ultimately it was not the right fit for my child. [The base is] not the right provision for all children. [Our base is] underfunded, inexperienced and lack the access to professional services SEN children need such as SaLT [speech and language therapist] and OT [occupational therapist]. In theory they are a good idea but unfortunately in practice they lack the specialist infrastructure needed to help SEN children succeed. My sons school asked for support from SaLT and OT and were sent videos to YouTube links, no offer to assess him or training for staff. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Many parents described staffing levels in the base as insufficient, with teaching assistants (TAs) commonly described as delivering the provision. They were perceived by parents as not having the expertise needed to adequately support their child. It was acknowledged by some parents that this resulted in a lack of time for staff to meet pupil needs. In some cases, base staff who were perceived as lacking skills in SEND were not offered support or guidance from specialist staff to better meet needs.

Fundamentally, the [base] was clearly inadequately funded and staff were insufficiently skilled to help children with SEN. Most staff were TAs [teaching assistants] with limited access to qualified teachers. The unit had very limited, if any, access to external support services like EPs, [educational psychologists], OTs [occupational therapists] and SaLTs [speech and language therapists] so unskilled staff had almost no outside support and guidance. Outside the unit the teachers simply did not have the time to support our child while in a mainstream class, even during periods when a TA was available. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Inclusiveness

### Feeling included

Feeling included and part of the mainstream school rather than just the base, was a strong theme amongst parents who stated that their and their child's base experience had been positive. When asked if their child felt part of the wider school rather than just the base, over half (55%) of parents felt that their child felt at least somewhat part of the wider school (36% disagreed, remainder didn't know). Just under half (45%) of parents agreed with the statement that their child feels included in the mainstream school, with over half of that proportion strongly agreeing (27% of all responses). Over a third (38%), disagreed with this statement (the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed).

Many parents who felt that their child's base was inclusive commented that this was the case due to a conscious effort by the wider school and senior leadership team to create a culture of inclusion through deliberate actions and planning by the staff.

The school worked very hard to ensure kids using the base were also part of the school and we could see how easily they could have felt more excluded had there not been this skilled effort to find ways of doing this - this is due to having very high quality staff and an excellent SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) and a lot of parent scrutiny. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Forty-four per cent of parents agreed that attending the base allows their child to remain in the local community compared to attending special school (36% disagreed, remainder neither agreed nor disagreed). Although almost half (46%) of parents agreed that their child spends less time travelling than they would to attend another suitable setting, many still felt they were travelling further away than they would like to. Some parents stated that they were travelling over 20 miles away for the provision, with one respondent having a drive time of 3 hours.

Half (50%) of parents agreed that their child benefits from socialising with children in the wider school whilst in the base (37% disagreed, the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed) and just under half (46%) of parents were happy with the amount of access their child had to mainstream classes (31% disagreed, the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed). Some parents felt that giving children the opportunity to move between the base and the mainstream school increased feelings of inclusion and ensured they did not feel secluded from mainstream peers. This was often mentioned as working well when the approach to this was led by how much the child wanted to be in either the base or mainstream, described below as the needs and voices of the young people being supported.

At no point was our young person made to feel “different” and secluded from mainstream peers. The way the [base is] run at this school celebrates inclusion, the needs and voices of the young people, and offers flexibility to move between groups (from [the base] into mainstream and vice versa). - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Some parents had children with experience of bases that had a specialism for particular types of SEND, such as children with hearing impairments or autism. In these cases, inclusion was described as being specific to these needs. The below example builds on the idea that inclusion was intentionally created by the school and “not just a gesture”.

Since being at [the school], [our child] has completely transformed. Her confidence has grown so much – she is now able to express herself clearly and manage her emotions much more easily. What stands out to us is how beautifully the staff include deaf children like [our child] within the mainstream classroom. The inclusion is natural, thoughtful and respectful – not just a gesture but real day-to-day involvement, which has made a huge difference in how [our child] feels at school. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

The child having agency to decide when they would like to be in the base versus mainstream was highlighted many times by parents who felt that their base was part of a wider inclusive school culture. Inclusion at school was stated to bring wider benefits outside of school life by some parents, highlighting improvements in social skills, confidence and happiness. In this context, the provision was often described as “life changing” for the children and young people receiving support.

Resource provisions for autism are extremely positive experiences for my son. He is fully included on the mainstream school but can return to the base when he is dysregulated or needs quieter time, or to take part in therapies/ groups/ interventions etc. We cannot speak highly enough about the positive benefits to children and young people of resource provisions. They are life changing both within the school day and then outside of school, for our son. We feel more resource provisions would massively benefit children/ young people with SEN in all areas. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Feelings of isolation

Many parents who had a child with a negative experience of a SEND base stated that a key reason for this was that attendance at the base felt like segregation or isolation from the remainder of the mainstream school and their peers, rather than inclusion. Over one third (36%) of parents felt that their child did not feel part of the wider school at all.

The base isolated my child from his peers and singles him out as being different. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Some parents provided examples of their child being given the opportunity to access mainstream common areas such as lunch and breaks spaces to visit friends in mainstream but not feeling able to which left them feeling isolated. Multiple parents also described situations where their child was disciplined for not following mainstream rules outside of the base which were usually permitted inside the base.

My son had no friends in [the] base and his mainstream friends weren't allowed to attend, it left him feeling isolated and he had to go to mainstream areas e.g., dinner hall, to meet friends, which he couldn't cope with and was punished for trying to manage his sensory dysregulation in these areas e.g., top button undone, using ear phones. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Some parents felt that the feeling of otherness was intensified for their child in the base, that the school was not inclusive in its approach to those receiving support from the base and that rather than including them, it highlighted their differences amongst mainstream peers.

Child felt isolated and the mainstream pupils treated him like he was in prison and were always trying to get glimpses of inside the unit etc and was known as 'the unit boy', mainstream parents were suspicious and wary of the unit children. He felt like a spectacle and a curiosity. It was the most un-inclusive environment and might as well walked around with a neon sign on head saying 'not fit for mainstream school'. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Physical environment

### Suitable spaces for support

The positive impact of the physical environment of the base on the experience of children and young people receiving support was consistently mentioned by parents. When asked about this in our survey, 65% of parents agreed that the base was a more suitable environment for their child (of which 46% strongly agreed) and over three quarters of all parents (77%) agreed that the smaller class sizes of the base are more suitable for their child (of which 59% strongly agreed).

Many spoke of the challenges that mainstream schools bring for children and young people with SEND, such as noisy classrooms, corridors and communal space which were said to lead to dysregulation and an inability to engage with education. Having a small, calm environment in the base which often had adaptive elements such as alternative materials and acoustics was stated to be a benefit for those receiving support from the base.

[Our child] had delayed language and a severe [speech and language need]. In year 1 in mainstream, he reached a point where he was turning around and not engaging. He would come out of school really dysregulated. The resource base has been amazing, improving his speech, language, reading and writing skills. He's thrived in the small class specially built environment which has very good acoustics. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

The environment of the base was often described as contributing to the ways in which the base was able to meet needs, in a way that the wider mainstream school had been unable to. Frequently, the smaller class sizes were a key benefit of the base environment.

The base provision has provided the appropriate support to meet my son's needs. The environment can accommodate his deafness and physical needs attributes to his ADHD. The smaller classes have provided the perfect opportunity for my son to be present but not overwhelmed. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Providing alternative environments such as sensory spaces and smaller group sizes was frequently viewed as enabling better outcomes for the children and young people receiving support. Parents often felt that the environment of the base contributed to progress that would not have happened if they had remained in mainstream classes.

My daughter could not cope in reception with the class size and noise and would have regular and distressing meltdowns. Once she was so distressed a member of staff broke down in tears. The small groups, higher staff ratio and sensory spaces enabled my daughter to regulate, and she has thrived in the unit. She is now ready to learn and is making academic progress that she would not have made in mainstream. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Overcrowding in bases

As discussed earlier in this report, the mainstream school environment, particularly in secondary school, was perceived by many parents to be a barrier for supporting their child's needs. Another barrier stated in the physical base environment was a low staff to child ratio, with overcrowding in bases often described as having the same impact as the negative drawbacks of mainstream classrooms with noise and the number of children and young people being supported worsening their base experience.

The base is overcrowded and the children's needs are diverse, some complex. It is not staffed by qualified teachers. [...] The space is busy. My child frequently becomes dysregulated, and I either pick her up from school and she accesses work via Google classroom, or she spends the time upset in a corridor. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Some parents had initially had a positive experience with a base, however overcrowding had created a barrier for their child to receive support and have their needs met.

The base has been wonderful for my son. Over the years it has become too crowded which has defeated the purpose of it being a quiet space, he now struggles to go in there as it is quite often too many people using it. It should be a maximum of 10 or it is a cause for dysregulation rather than a cure. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Communication with parents and family support

### Good communication and support for parents

Sixty-two per cent of parents agreed that they felt informed about how their child was progressing in the base, of which 43% strongly agreed. Just under a third of parents disagreed with this statement, with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

In written responses, parents frequently stated that good communication with the school and receiving regular updates on how their child was progressing was part of why their base experience had been positive.

I was very nervous about the mainstream environment as [our child] is extremely sensory in his needs but nothing I threw at the staff in terms of his needs was too much, the communication between us as parents and the staff in the base has ultimately allowed us to navigate what appears to many to be a 'normal' high school experience but most importantly [our child] is happy, and being stretched academically. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

When parents felt listened to, this contributed to perceived positive experiences. Many parents felt that the support had improved not just the life of the young person being supported by the base, but the wider family unit as well.

[Our child in the base] is safe and well cared for and communication with us as parents is good. [...] Our son attends school full time which would never have been possible in a mainstream setting, and this has provided invaluable consistency and stability for both our son and our family unit. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Poor communication with parents

Whilst good parent and school communication was seen as an enabler, many parents expressed difficulty in receiving regular updates or consistent communication from their child's school. A lack of communication was viewed as a barrier to positive experiences and did not allow parents to have a good understanding of how their child was progressing in the base.

We feel the [base] is the right choice for our child but due to not getting regular feedback it's difficult to know how much progress they are making. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Some parents had expressed concern that poor comms with the school results in feeling left out of important conversations which are central to the support that their child is receiving. In some cases, this concern had been taken on board by the school who were working to improve communication with the family.

Communication from some areas of the school has at times been inconsistent, and there have been occasions where I have felt left out of important conversations regarding my son's care and support. However, the SENCO has been quick to acknowledge and address these issues, and she is actively working with staff and the office to improve communication with families like ours. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Pupil outcomes and learning

### Positive impact on pupil learning and attainment

Sixty-four per cent of parents felt that the base had made an at least somewhat positive impact on their child's progress and attainment (of which 45% felt this was a significant positive impact). Just over half (52%) of parents agreed that attending the base allows their child to access the benefits of a mainstream education such as curriculum and qualifications. Over half (58%) agreed that they were happy with the quality of education that their child receives (of which 39% strongly agreed).

The majority (57%) of parents felt that their child has better academic outcomes at the base compared to if they attended mainstream classes full time. Of the parents who described why they agreed, some mentioned that they felt their child had access to a broader range of subjects to gain qualifications such as GCSEs.

The base did their best to integrate children into wider school whilst providing support and understanding. My child accessed 1:1 support for English and Maths and science in the base and was able to access option subjects in the mainstream such as Japanese and Film Studies. In a special school he would not have been offered a full curriculum or 1:1 support for GCSEs. He probably would not have had the opportunity to take GCSEs in a special school and he would not have been able to access learning in a mainstream school due to sensory needs. [...] Following the [base] he navigated a mainstream 6th form (with difficulty and with flexible hours) and is now preparing to attend university. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Over one third (39%) of parents overall disagreed that outcomes were better for their child than if they had attended special school (32% agreed, the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed). However secondary school parents were more likely to agree that their child had better academic outcomes compared to if they attended special school (36% secondary, 29% primary).

In some cases, although parents felt positive about the base, they felt their child would have had their needs better met in special school.

I felt he made some progress but believe his needs would have been met more in a SEN school. But we really liked the unit and his teachers. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Some parents praised the school and particularly the staff for their work in the base, where they described having experienced progress and success for their child for some time before then moving to a special school in instances where the complexity of need was very high.

I was reluctant to accept the place as we wanted a specialist complex needs setting but the [base] has been amazing for my daughter. She has benefited hugely from the quieter space, smaller classes and greater number of highly trained staff. Her classroom has access to so many sensory resources which help to meet her needs. The staff understand her needs really well and her confidence and communication have come in leaps and bounds. After two years in the [base] she is transitioning to a complex needs school this year which will be better able to meet her physical and sensory needs but I would have happily kept her there for another year. I was wrong to have pre judged the efficiency of the [base], if my daughter's needs had been slightly less complex, I know she would have been spent more time alongside the mainstream children. She was able to attend the same school that I went to as a child in a location much closer to our house than all the 'local' special schools. I have a lot more faith in these units having experienced one for my child. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Wider pupil outcomes

Parents described in their written responses the types of outcomes that their child had experienced when their needs had been met by the base. These outcomes largely centred around two main themes:

- 'hard' outcomes, which were described as improvements in attendance, attainment and qualifications
- 'soft' outcomes, which included increases in confidence, social and interpersonal skills, independence, happiness, mental health, emotional regulation and wellbeing

Many parents felt strongly that the base had contributed to improvements in both of these areas, describing the change as "life changing" in one parent's account below.

My little boy entered the [base] unable to read or write and with significant trauma from his experience in a mainstream classroom on a part time timetable. He suffered with crippling anxiety and incredibly low self-esteem. And whilst he still suffers anxiety and low self-esteem (and is obviously still autistic) the change in him is incredible. He has come on leaps and bounds and whilst still behind his peers he is reading and writing and learning in an environment where he feels safe to do so. It's been life changing for him and in a positive way. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Commonly, parents reflected on the change they had perceived in their child when comparing their progress in mainstream classes versus the base, with the base often achieving positive outcomes in a short space of time.

My child could not read or write and was very disruptive in class when it came to learning. Within 1 year of being in the SEN unit he was able to read and write and he has learned with the right tools to manage his emotions better. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Using the base to support periods of transition was mentioned by parents as an outcome in some circumstances. This ranged from transitioning back into mainstream classes of the same school, or the base supporting them to transition between primary and secondary schools.

The specialist resource provision and support that it offers to my son has enabled him to transition successfully and complete his first year at secondary school. Without access to it I feel that he would have experienced a very challenging year and may have even refused school all together. We feel extremely grateful and lucky that our son has been able to access such a wonderful provision. It has had such a positive and life changing impact on his education. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## **Inability to meet pupil needs**

Although over half (58%, Figure 2) of parents agreed that their child's experience of a base was positive, 25% of those responding to our survey had at least a somewhat negative experience. Many parents provided detailed written descriptions of why their child's experience had not been positive and in almost all cases a key theme emerged of the base not being able to meet the needs of their child. When the base was unable to meet the needs of the child, parents described this as having a negative impact on their outcomes. This included a worsening of mental health, poor school attendance or refusal to attend completely, and in some cases creating "school-based trauma".

The LA persuaded me to give the base a try although I knew it would not suit. ASD [autism spectrum disorder] diagnosis came after they started and as the base was primarily for language it couldn't meet their needs. Despite the good intentions of the staff, the environment was overwhelming and led to school-based trauma, which has taken a long time to overcome now they are in the right setting. They are now included in school with peers who have similar needs and with whom friendships have developed. Units/bases might work for some but not for all. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

When bases were unable to meet pupil needs, this was commonly described as being due to lack of knowledge in SEN from the base staff, overcrowding of pupils in attendance and unsuitable physical environments which were overstimulating.

The SEN unit and staff had a lack of understanding of child's needs. I felt it had a one size fits all approach and if the approach didn't work for the child they didn't want the child at the school. The SEN unit said it couldn't meet my child's needs and he was threatened with permanent exclusion if he returned to school following a fixed term exclusion. We were told that they would be unable to provide the additional support he had been receiving if he returned to school. My child was then out of school for two years before receiving a place in a special school where he is now thriving. He is due to take GCSEs next year with predicted good grades. The treatment my child received at the SEN unit caused multiple trauma which my child still experiences the psychological impact from to this day.  
- *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

Many parents mentioned that having a large number of pupils with complex needs in one setting was difficult for their child to navigate, leading to burnout, disengagement from education and dysregulation.

The children attending the base have an incredibly diverse range of needs, ranging from complex physical and mental disabilities, to sensory needs and those with milder intellectual challenges. However it is insufficiently resourced, from a staffing, funding, experience and environmental perspective (a lack of appropriate space) with the result that children receive a generic one size fits all approach that does not meet the diverse range of need and ability within the unit. Children frequently become dysregulated and their behaviour can be harmful and disruptive to others that are sensory avoidant or need quieter areas. My daughter attended the base but did not thrive or access the curriculum in the way she is capable of. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

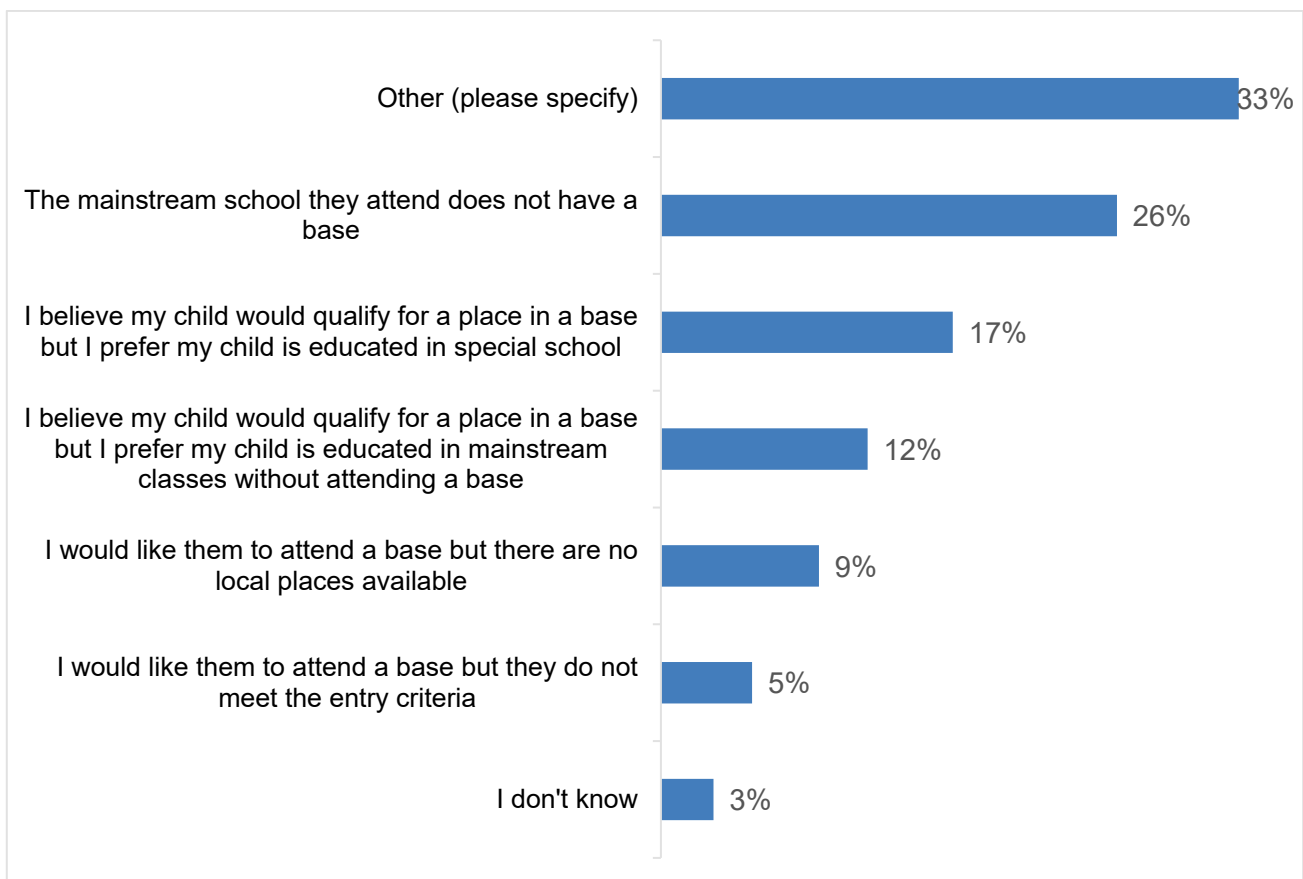
In some circumstances, parents described situations where the base was used for behaviour support as well as SEN, which further compounded difficulties of mixing with other pupils.

As the school began using the base for children with behavioural needs there were no staff available to implement the strategies the children needed. Behaviour from other children was impacting children who was already there, became copied behaviours. Staff openly admitted they couldn't manage, my child's behaviour rapidly declined as he was no longer getting the support he needed, his needs weren't being met. - *Parent of child with SEND base experience*

## Reasons that a SEND base was not used

The aim of this research was to understand the experience of parents and their children who have received provision from a SEND base. However, we did give parents who have not experienced a SEND base an opportunity to state why.

**Figure 5. Why does your child not attend a base for SEND support? (multiple answer)**



Base: 288 parents whose child did not attend a SEND base. Multiple answers could be selected.

Over a quarter (26%) of those whose child did not attend a base for SEND support said that this was because the mainstream school they attend does not have a base, and a further 9% said there were no local places available. Seventeen per cent believed their child would qualify for a place in a base but preferred their child to be educated in special school, with 12% preferring their child to be educated in mainstream classes without attending a base.

Those without base experience gave written answers to detail why this was. The key themes that emerged from these written answers were:

- the belief that the mainstream school could not meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs in a SEND base

- trauma, anxiety and emotionally based school avoidance from mainstream school experience resulting in an ability to attend a base in this setting
- parent perception that children and young people with sensory and physical needs are not compatible with a SEND base within a mainstream environment, especially in cases where they are expected to spend some of their time in mainstream
- structural issues such as a lack of SEND base places, closures of bases and oversubscription
- where SEND base places required an EHCP for attendance, many parents were still awaiting this to enable their child to attend
- the perception that children and young people in SEND bases are segregated from the rest of the mainstream school in a way which was not believed to be inclusive.

Where the mainstream school setting was perceived to be inaccessible, this was particularly the case where base attendance required a percentage of time spent in the mainstream school environment as well.

The criteria for attending a [base] in my local area is that the child attends mainstream classes without 1:1 support for 50% of the time. My child is not academically incapable but has multiple disabilities that means they cannot access education via such a model. – *Parent of child without SEND base experience.*

Some parents had turned to alternative provision instead of mainstream or special school due to the lack of places available locally.

We couldn't get a place in a base or a special school (couldn't meet need / did not have space). My child has pretty much been denied an education. Eventually got alternative provision, but no academic provision despite high intelligence. – *Parent of child without SEND base experience.*

A small amount of parents had been offered a SEND base place in a mainstream school by the local authority but had appealed the placement through a SEND tribunal due to their child having complex needs and obtained a special school place instead.

Our survey gave parents who do not have SEND base experience the opportunity to share wider views on SEND bases. Many of these views reinforce those shared above, and key themes included:

- parent concern that bases may promote segregation rather than inclusion, including fears that those attending would be bullied
- the perception that bases are not resourced by adequately trained staff or specialist members of staff
- that the mainstream school setting is an unsuitable environment for SEND bases

- parent perception that bases do not meet academic needs
- concerns over inadequate funding of mainstream schools to be able to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND
- that specialist schools remain essential in cases of complex need
- the perception that secondary school bases will not be able to meet needs as well as primary school due to the busier environment

The view that 'one size does not fit all' was common amongst responses, with the perception that bases can be effective for certain need types but not all.

SEND basis within mainstream schools have a very important role to play in SEND education but the quality of the provision is of high importance - it needs to be evaluated effectively. I once managed and taught in a [base] for language and what was of utmost importance was the fidelity to the needs of the children and grouping APPROPRIATE children who needed support but could then be included in the mainstream part of the school with support to be with their peers. It must have a clear criteria for entry and ensure that it doesn't become a 'holding place' for inappropriately placed children in mainstream school who need a special school. –

*Parent of child without SEND base experience*

As illustrated in the above quote, parents felt that SEND bases in mainstream schools could work effectively in contexts where the provision was well funded, resourced with specialist staff, were suitable adapted environments with small and calm spaces and were designed with specific SEND types and needs in mind.

## Conclusion

The majority (58%) of parents who took part in our survey reported that their child had a positive base experience. Positive experiences were commonly associated with children and young people's needs being met which were enabled by high quality teaching staff with expertise in SEN, access to specialist staff, suitable physical base environments, appropriate curriculum and access to qualifications. Feelings of inclusion within the wider school were commonly reported to be a key factor in enabling positive base experiences.

When needs were met, outcomes for children and young people in bases were reported to fall into both 'hard' outcomes such as improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour as well as 'soft' outcomes such as increases in confidence, social and interpersonal skills, independence, happiness, mental health, emotional regulation and wellbeing. These types of outcomes were often described by parents as being positively "life changing" for the young person and their family.

Parents with a child who had experience of a base in primary school were the most likely to report positive experiences, including that the provision was able to meet their child's needs, provide specialised support and provide a calm and inclusive environment. Larger mainstream school environments, such as secondary schools, were frequently reported to be a barrier to positive experiences of school. In these contexts, bases were viewed as a "safe space" away from overstimulating mainstream environments. However, common areas in the school such as corridors and communal spaces for breaks were sometimes viewed as a barrier. Additionally, bullying of children and young people in bases was more commonly associated with secondary school bases in written responses from parents.

Challenges to positive experiences included overcrowding in bases, reduced capacity of staff or a lack of expertise in SEN from base staff. In negative experiences, parents reported that their child felt segregated from the remainder of the mainstream school or that their needs were not being adequately met which was reported to result in worsened mental health for children and young people receiving the provision. Some parents reported a lack of communication between themselves and the school, which they felt contributed to negative base experiences.

Those with children who had EHCPs were significantly more likely to have a positive base experience than those without (61% vs 40%). However, this cohort were also much more likely to be receiving provision in an LA funded SEN unit or resourced provision, which was associated with significantly higher rates of positive experiences (80% of those with an EHCP attended an SU or RP). There were no significant differences between those with and without EHCPs in SU or RPs, and as such our data suggests that the positive experiences are driven by the type of base that those with EHCPs are most likely to attend rather than the presence of the EHCP itself.

## Next steps for Department for Education

We thank parents for taking part in this research and we value their experiences as part of our growing evidence base to ensure we support schools to deliver consistent high quality provision. This includes working with independent academics, consulting with leaders in the education sector, parent and carer groups and leading charities.

As set out in [Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#), the Department is committed to ensuring that every child has the strongest foundation possible with enriching, inclusive school experiences. There are many examples of inclusion bases in mainstream settings that offer high quality teaching, bespoke learning environments and flexible access to specialist education or health support, helping children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. However, we know that a lack of focus on inclusion bases in the past has led to some examples of inconsistent practice and experiences for children and young people and their families. We want to scale up high quality provision so that families' experiences are positive in every instance a child accesses a base, not just most. As a core component of the government's high needs capital investment – at least £3.7bn between 2025 and 2030 – we are funding a transformational expansion of inclusion bases, so they become a core part of every local education offer.

We are working to ensure that all bases are underpinned by inclusive practices and deliver consistently high-quality provision, drawing on specialist support. Informed by co-creation with stakeholders, we are publishing [national guidance](#), setting out the principles of high-quality practice. This will form a benchmark when Ofsted inspect settings so that schools understand what good looks like and are held to account. To provide additional oversight new data collection measures will record which settings are operating a base and the pupils accessing it. We continue to expand and roll out peer networks of best practice which schools will be able to access as part of the Universal RISE Inclusive Mainstream programme.



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